

VZCZCXRO8728  
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA  
DE RUEHCO #0202/01 1010709  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 100709Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0265  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1255  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0330

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COTONOU 000202

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W DBANKS  
PARIS AND LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BN](#)  
SUBJECT: BENIN: ELECTORAL PROCESS IN TURMOIL

REF: (A) COTONOU 201 (B) COTONOU 104 (C) COTONOU 43 (D) 07 COTONOU

817

11. (U) SUMMARY: To mark the second anniversary of President Yayi's rule, deputies from his political coalition Force Cowry for an Emerging Benin (FCBE) took stock on April 5-6 of the political situation. They asked the government to suspend immediately the electoral process after the arrest of eleven (11) opposition-affiliated members of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENA) who were accused of misappropriating 50,000 blank voter identification cards. The CENA released a public announcement acknowledging the responsibility of the accused. On April 8 all eleven (11) were acquitted, but the GOB appealed the decision. Following talks between the GOB and CENA, the GOB dropped its bid to reschedule the April 20 election, and CENA officially launched the electoral campaign ten days before the election as required by law. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) To mark the second anniversary of President Boni Yayi's administration, deputies of the pro-Yayi FCBE coalition gathered in a two-day workshop, April 5-6 to assess political and economic progress since 2006. The FCBE deputies released a declaration that outlined the main irregularities that have marred the electoral process. These include fraudulent withdrawal of voting materials on a large scale, opaque management of the CENA, illegal and hasty recruitment of 280 workers all affiliated with the Renaissance du Benin party (RB), and CENA's failure to follow proper procedures for ordering voter cards (Ref A). The deputies also criticized the CENA's president for his passive attitude in the face of all the irregularities recorded during the voter registration process.

13. (U) FCBE deputies demanded the immediate suspension of the electoral process, the resignation of the members of CENA's board, the examination of CENA's management by the Supreme Court and the re-start of the voter's registration process.

14. (U) The CENA set up an internal investigative committee to look into the case. On April 5 and 6, CENA's members held a plenary session and issued a public announcement based on the findings of the investigative committee. The investigative committee's report rejected the hypothesis of voter card misappropriation. However, it acknowledged that the cards were taken from the CENA's headquarter by a non-authorized official. In the announcement, CENA's members recognized the illegal act of their colleagues. They reiterated commitment to securing free and fair elections and called on the support of the Beninese citizens, the civil society and political leaders in fighting electoral fraud.

15. (U) RB party leaders denied their involvement in the 50,000 voter cards affair and accused President Yayi's FCBE of plotting against them to demoralize the party and jeopardize the whole electoral process. In reply, the FCBE group demanded the immediate suspension

of the electoral process and the dismissal of CENA's members. They threatened to boycott the polls if the government did not satisfy their claims.

¶6. (U) During a 24-hour trial attended by political leaders and supporters, the court of Cotonou amended the charge of fraud retained against the eleven accused. The court charged them with attempts to alter voter registry and finally released them, because the government was unable to produce proof of the allegation. The government via the public prosecutor challenged the ruling, and the eleven accused are expected to go back to court on April 11.

¶7. (U) On April 8, three ministers (the Minister in Charge of the Relations with the Institutions, Spokesman of the government; the Minister of Decentralization, Local Authority and Planning; and the Minister of Economy and Finance) held talks with CENA's president. A few hours after that visit, the FCBE group reconsidered its stand and decided to participate in the April 20 local elections, and the CENA launched the official start of the campaign.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Apparently in response to potentially adverse voter reaction to another postponement, the GOB maintained the April 20 date for local elections. However, the situation sparked mixed reactions as some political leaders spoke in favor of a postponement to ensure a peaceful climate, whereas others favored a continuation of the process. A well-informed lawyer told Post that judges belonging to the Benin National Union of Magistrates (UNAMAB) and who are unfavorable to President Yayi's policy tried the eleven people. This cast serious doubts on the objectivity and fairness of the court's verdict and explains the government's appeal. Whatever the outcome of the appeal, the elections, if held, may spark extended claims and result in a low voter turnout. The elections could also cause social unrest if political leaders do not find a speedy way to reassure citizens and to restore confidence in the electoral process, having seen the elections postponed from February

COTONOU 00000202 002 OF 002

17 to April 13 and finally to April 20 (Refs B and C). END COMMENT.  
BROWN